

## **Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Board of Trustees Meeting**

A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home Holyoke (HLY) was held telephonically on Thursday, April 1, 2021. The meeting began at 5:06 pm.

### **Members Present:**

Gary Keefe, Chairman; Mark Bigda; Sean Collins; Kevin Jourdain, Cindy Lacoste, Isaac Mass and Carmen Ostrander

### **Also Present:**

Cheryl Poppe, Secretary, Department of Veterans Services (DVS); ; Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel; Deacon, Legal Counsel, DVS; Catherine Starr, Secretariat Human Resources Director; Jessica Sherer, Secretary Director of Talent Acquisition; Faythe Abber-Van Dam, Director of Recruitment Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Jamie Gaitan, Tech Support; and Kathleen Denner, Recording Secretary. Support and Interview panelists from the community: Eric Segundo, Pam Quirk and Mary Moscato.

Roll Call is as follows: Mark Bigda (Yes), Sean Collins (Yes); Kevin Jourdain (Yes) Cindy Lacoste (Yes); Isaac Mass (Yes); Carmen Ostrander (Yes); Gary Keefe (Yes).

**Pledge of Allegiance** - All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Public Comment:** No public comment this month. No Public Comment at this Special Meeting. This Special Meeting will be open to the public. The purpose of this Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees is to conduct final interviews for the position of Superintendent. After the Pledge of Allegiance, the Board will conduct interviews during open session.

### **Discussion and Scoring Results of final interviews**

Charmian Keefe announced that Secretary Poppe will not be making any comments on the candidates since they will be reporting to her, thank you for participating and process. Who ever is selected will receive her full support and the support of the DVS.

**Pam Quirk:** Stated both candidates are capable and qualified. They have been competitive candidates to interview. Both candidates are very experienced. Rick Holloway on her score sheet scored higher. He has the compassion and experience in a veteran's home. He came across as more transformational.

**Eric Segundo:** I feel both are great, all of the candidates have been great. The final two have very competitive scores. Rich Holloway is a natural leader coming from a veteran's home background is a plus. From the conversations they have had he embraces his staff. His position on CMS certification is big. He has a clear vision for the home with no conflicts or reservations. I am confident he can bring the home to where it needs to be.

**Mary Moscato:** I felt finding two candidates that are mature in experience with long term health care and keep up their skill level was great. I am a believer in leadership and vision for home. Rick Holloway has unwavering commitment to veterans. Robert Engell as a lead candidate had excellent answers regarding the Pearlstein report. He has experience in two major areas; diversity equity and labor unions. He will have a short learning curve. He has proven his skill with CMS results, and he works well with trustees.

**Trustee Bigda:** I think both are very strong and I am not surprised that my points were off by one point. With Rick Holloway as the leader. He showed a very decisive way of going about things and he can take command and move things forward. Robert Engell has talent, but I did not fee he address some questions

directly. My only drawback is that I could not ask the questions regarding why Rick Holloway was interested in Western Massachusetts.

**Trustee Collins:** This was a great process. I really liked the back to back interview process on Tuesday evening. Both candidates did terrific in an open forum knowing a lot of people were listening. Rick Holloway was highest score in totality of points. I appreciated the depth of his answers based on his vast experience including regulations and certifications. Several examples of taking care of the staff and in turn will result in taking care of our veterans. He builds up his people, he is a real leader and lets people do their jobs. He is well connected in this industry. The tone of his answers and addressed culture of any organization, and his clinical expectations were addressed. The TBI answer was outstanding. Trustee Collins quoted Rick Holloway "every minute of every day is special" in the life of veterans and staff, this shows Rick Holloways' excellence of care, honor and personal interest in the veterans he cares for. Being a horse trainer, I feel as a clinician, gives him very important insight as equines are very perceptive to humans around them. He talked multiple times about the financial impacts, and we have a steward of financial wellbeing, he knows regulations, and he is all in for the families and veterans. Rick Holloway has a clear understanding of how a team succeeds by understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

**Trustee Jourdain:** I would be doing a disservice if I don't also at this moment look at this as a watershed moment for the Board of Trustees. In reflecting on my comments that I wanted to say this evening, it would be remiss and absent if I don't also make a point that this voting and of itself is historic. Previously there was some ambiguity as to the fact that this board could even vote on this matter. The statute is as crystal clear as it's ever been. And to get us to this point tonight we've had to travel a long road that took us through the Hampden County Superior Court. I want to thank Judge Ferrara for his well thought out and measured opinion. We owe him a thanks for the list of names, so we thank you. He ruled that it's this board that makes this decision. So, I just want to say for the record, I thank him, I have thanked him before. It is this board that hires, I know there is language floating around that we are going to recommend someone to the Governor. I don't understand that, but I'll go along with it. But whoever this board votes is the person that is hired. And I want to state for the record this is the person that will be hired, with or without his recommendation. Next point, we have 2 tremendous candidates, both very thoughtful people who have made it to the finals. No surprise that these two-gentleman made it to this point. The decision became for me fairly easy because one of them just clearly stood out. I will also say, though before I say the name of the person and why I'm voting for them, I also want to say the State Legislature and Attorney Pearlstein thank you for their work. I also want to say that I am keeping my commitment to only vote for a candidate who was a licensed nursing home administrator, just as was recommended by Attorney Pearlstein. There have been numerous opportunities before this moment to get detoured, there were a lot of detours. This looked sort of like craters on the surface of the moon, the road to get to this vote was not easy. This vote definitely would not have happened tonight. So that everybody is aware of that and the making of the sausage was not a pretty picture. But nevertheless, here we are, and I am very pleased that once this got on the straight and narrow, we got it to a great path that's going to give us a great candidate. In the person that I'm voting for someone who is eminently qualified, transformational and that's a great use of the word, that's a word that I use. One of the four goals I had set out certainly with my time as chair and as a member of this body was picking a transformation leader for this organization. Someone who is engaging, has an outstanding reputation who has immense experience. Someone who is fully independent who put the Veterans first and last all of their lives. Someone who would have no ties. Someone who is new and in this case someone who is going to show that they have transformation experience before and moved a 2-star facility to a 5-star facility. In the case of the person I am about to vote for someone who has previously run a stat veteran home. So, with having said that it is really my pleasure ultimately here momentarily to vote for Rick Holloway. I think he is going to be an outstanding superintendent. Someone that I can absolutely feel is going to do the right by these veterans that they call the Holyoke Soldiers' Home home. They

deserve nothing less than the absolute best. As we go forward I hope that this process continues in terms of our new foray into a board that exercises its lawful authority that will continue to provide ongoing mentoring in support to this superintendent and we will continue to be part of the evaluation process going forward and this Board will need to adopt procedures around how we provide input and support so that this new superintendent will have the support and guidance that they deserves. Moreover, I want this new superintendent, Mr. Holloway, that if you should be fortunate enough to be elected here, momentarily that he has is going to have all the resources in the world. He is going to have a new 400 million dollar facility, a caring staff, veterans community and local coalition, and absolutely the people of the greater Holyoke community who will welcome him and want him to be nothing but a success on behalf his service to our Veterans. So, I am thrilled to vote for Rick Holloway tonight and I wish him all the success in the world and with this success will come the success of this entire institution

**Trustee Lacoste:** I am so glad to be part of this. We have been working on this for quite a bit of time. I am looking forward to moving the Home forward and learning to make it the best in the country. I think with the candidates that we have talked to I have seen people that are dedicated to doing what is right for the Veterans, the staff and the community. The person I was fond of Rick Holloway because of being a prior military member, I want somebody that can put forth their ideas in a succinct way and lead. I believe in his vision; I like the way he is boots on the ground. He knows his people and what do they need and how he can he help. He will support his staff to be at upmost ability, so the Veterans get the best care. As you train your staff, which I was taught in the Military ,you train the people that follow you, you want them to know what they are doing and you have to make sure they have the tools to do that. Part of what makes him a good leader is that he takes care of his team. He also has a clear vision of moving forward 6, 9 12 to correct problems he saw, to train the staff so they are comfortable doing what they are doing, make sure we are taking care of the resources he is given and not be wasteful. His has a personality that draws you in. He showed his humanity, compassion and that he is a solid leader and I am very excited to say that I support Rick Holloway.

**Trustee Mass:** Thank you to everyone who has been involved. Starting with Bennet Walsh who gave us his resignation. He could have dragged this process out a lot further. I want to thank our staff, Human Resources, Cheryl Poppe, DVS, and EOHHS. I appreciate the efforts of former Chairman Jourdan to make this a national search and that we got the outside consultants. BE Smith, to assist in the search. Former Chairman Jourdain and Current Chairman Keefe who worked with me to insist that this be a process that was not a siloed process with just the trustees and that we engage stakeholders from the community. All of the comments were helpful because everyone comes from a different perspective. Given the circumstances we are in the process went great. Thank you to all of the candidates that applied. We had a preliminary interview process and come forward with two. I want to thank the final two who made it to the final round and interviewed with us. They both demonstrated the commitment to the institution and the work they do. I like my colleagues found Rick far and away the best candidate. This should be the premier facility in the country, so why would any veteran not want to come. As a trustee I know this will be the most important thing the entire time that I am on the board because everything board does is to support the superintendent. The things that were most notable to me were the experience Rick has specifically what is going to be our future needs the things we have discussed a new building, unions, staff, community. He specifically has experience with victims of traumatic brain injury also with patients with PTSD. He has an enormous understanding of the military culture and I don't think he references shows if he has any military service. So his ability to understand that I think comes from when he served in the state veterans home and he expressed it with concrete examples of what would be done. He talked about changing the culture to team culture, where people work together. I feel this is a great opportunity to come together as a team and having someone who is a team leader. I am impressed with his medical and clinical understanding. I have looked at what happened during the COVID 19 outbreak and the Pearlstein report. The primary cause I saw

was an administration that did not have a CMO available and not having a clinical administrator who understood clinical situations. I have no doubt, with Mr. Holloway, that would not have happened. He has had a COVID exposure did not try to shift blame to anyone else. He will fit in with the work that has already been started. His commitment to current his institution. He talked about this process and what was good, what he was learning and will use all he learned moving forward. It is my hope that after we vote today that Rick Holloway will be our new Superintendent.

**Trustee Ostrander:** Thank for being part of the process, it has been eye opening. I felt both of the candidates were incredible. Rick Holloway brought up building the people around him up and get out of the way. His answer to TBI regarding not treating with medication was huge, not every diagnosis can be treated with medication, you have to find alternatives to treat them. His answer regarding showing honor and dignity to Veterans and staff members was very strong. He is going to find the weakness within the home and fix them, aggressively. My choice is Rick Holloway.

**Trustee Keefe:** Both candidates have scored high marks. The final four interviews thank you. Thank the administration team for keeping things going. I really liked Rick Holloway's decisiveness. If you go back and listen to the interview, he had his three goals and long-term planning throughout. I feel Rick Holloway can come in and hit the goals and move us forward. The Soldier' Home has a lot of attention right now and we are under a microscope. We are going to be watched so we need to make sure we have everything locked tight moving forward. So, based on that I think Rick Holloway is the final piece of the machine that we need, my recommendation is Rick Holloway.

Trustee Jourdain made a motion to offer the position of Superintendent to Rick Holloway. The motion was seconded by Trustee Collins seconded.

Chairman Keefe conducted a Roll Call vote: Mark Bigda (Yes), Sean Collins (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Gary Keefe (Yes). The vote was unanimous. Motion passes.

Trustee Mass made a motion to conclude Public Session, seconded by Trustee Jourdain.

Chairman Keefe conducted a Roll Call vote: Mark Bigda (Yes), Sean Collins (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Gary Keefe (Yes). It was unanimously VOTED to conclude at 5:49pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Denner  
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees